


**SVMG**

March 22, 2004

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The Honorable John Howe  
City of Sunnyvale  
P.O. Box 3707  
Sunnyvale, CA 94088-3707

Dear Mayor Howe:

I write on behalf of the Silicon Valley Manufacturing Group to ask that the City of Sunnyvale weigh in on the draft EIR/EIS recently released by the High Speed Rail Authority on California's proposed high-speed rail service. Specifically, we ask that you support the Authority's conclusion to use of one of two southern alignments (Pacheco or Diablo Range) into the Bay Area and to eliminate the Altamont Pass from further consideration.

As you may know, the Silicon Valley Manufacturing Group (SVMG), founded in 1978 by David Packard of Hewlett-Packard, represents 180 of the Valley's most respected employers. SVMG members collectively provide nearly 225,000 jobs, or one of every four jobs in Silicon Valley.

SVMG has long supported the concept of a high-speed rail (HSR) line connecting southern and northern California. The High Speed Rail Authority, the organization responsible for planning, designing, constructing and operating the system, plans to run the first leg of the system between Los Angeles and San Francisco via San José. Ultimately, the line would be extended to Oakland, Sacramento and San Diego. The system would employ electrically-powered, steel-wheel-on-steel-rail trains operating at speeds up to 220 mph—technology long proven in Europe and Japan. Riders would be transported from downtown San Francisco to Los Angeles in just under 2 ½ hours.

High-speed rail would relieve highway and air traffic between the Bay Area and Los Angeles, one of the busiest air traffic corridors in the nation. It would stretch the existing capacity of airports in both metropolitan areas by enabling them to focus on longer haul, larger passenger load flights. And it would also be two to three time less expensive (as well as less polluting and more energy efficient) than expanding highways and airports to accommodate the travel demands of an additional 11 million California residents—a total of 45 million people—by 2020

Constructing a high-speed rail system would also give commuter rail service in Silicon Valley a big boost. The program-level EIR/EIS considered two alignments options into/out of the Bay Area—the Pacheco Pass (SR 152) alignment and the Diablo Range Direct alignment—with variations on both. Regardless of the option, once the trains hit the Bay Area (somewhere between Gilroy and San Jose), they would head north along the Caltrain corridor. In doing so, the HSR will help Caltrain achieve several of its long-term goals: electrification; grade-separation; and increasing the speed and frequency of the commuter rail service.

The Authority considered and rejected one other Bay Area alignment, the Altamont Pass alignment, which they concluded would be more problematic from an operational and environmental standpoint. Following this route, trains would enter the region via the Altamont Pass to Union City. From Union City, the train would split into three lines: one south to San Jose, another north to Oakland, and a third to San Francisco. The latter would require a new Bay Bridge, parallel to the reconstructed Dumbarton Rail Bridge, as the one-track rail drawbridge would not meet the technical requirements of the new HSR service. Splitting the service into three, rather than two lines, would reduce train frequency and hence ridership while substantially increasing operational costs. This issue combined with the cost of building a new rail bridge, and the environmental hurdles that would need to be overcome to proceed, are so steep as to make this option impractical.

The removal of the Altamont Pass corridor from future consideration has generated some controversy. Some proponents have argued that this route would reduce traffic congestion in the Altamont Corridor. But the HSR system is designed for long-distance rather than local commuter service; it will cost more and make fewer stops than a commuter line. The Altamont Commuter Express, already in operation in that corridor, is far better suited to this purpose. Many environmentalists oppose the idea of cutting through, tunneling under or skirting north of Henry Coe Park, even via tunnel (variations on the Diablo Direct Route). Others express concern about potential impacts to wetlands from the Pacheco Pass/I-152 route.

We appreciate these concerns. However, given the scale of this project, there is no route that the high-speed rail could take that would not have an impact on the environment. The EIR/EIS acknowledges that the Diablo Direct and the Pacheco Pass alignments could have a significant impact on parks, wetlands, natural and historic resources, and farmland. But the alternatives—expanding highways and airports—would be far worse. The project-level EIR/EIS, the next stage in the HSR development, will give the HSR Authority and the public more information on the specific potential impacts of these routes and ways those might be mitigated. Studying the Altamont Pass further will not make it more operationally or environmentally viable.

SVMG has consistently advocated that the HSR line utilize a southern alignment into the Bay Area to maximize ridership, minimize operational costs, and ensure that Silicon Valley is served by the new service. We ask that the City of Sunnyvale join us in supporting the High Speed Authority's decision to pursue a southern alignment—Pacheco or Diablo Range—into the Bay Area and eliminate the Altamont Pass from further consideration. The deadline for submitting letters to the High Speed Rail Authority on the draft EIR/EIS is Friday, May 7.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Carl Guardino  
President & CEO

cc: Sunnyvale City Council

P.S. Due to the state deficit, Governor Schwarzenegger has proposed delaying the \$9.9 billion high-speed rail bond measure currently scheduled for the November 2004 ballot. Assemblymember Perata is carrying SB 1483, which would postpone the ballot measure until November 2006 and the sale of the bonds until 2008. Other bills that would postpone the ballot for a longer period would likely kill the project.